

Talking Points

Response to Ronnie Agnew, [REDACTED]

Regarding April 19, 2009, story “Miss. election donors under scrutiny; Barbour, Hood got money from some who work for state” Story written by Natalie Chandler.

- A thinly disguised attempt to protect Jim Hood by including Haley Barbour in a “see, everybody does it” kind of story. As far as Governor Barbour is concerned, it’s the worst kind of absurd “gotcha,” “advocacy” journalism – short on facts, long on opinion and innuendo, with the intent of changing state law.
- This reporter and her editors should register as lobbyists, so intent are they on influencing legislation.
- Start with the headline: Who is doing the “scrutiny” since no state or federal agency was mentioned as doing any scrutiny of any kind?
- The fundamental differences in approach are stunning, and first mentioned in the 18th paragraph of the story. The fact is, contributors to Haley Barbour won competitive contracts in every case the story mentions, not “most of the contracts.”
- By not mentioning the competitive bidding process early in the story, it leaves the erroneous impression of some kind of wrong-doing.
- And then, the story pairs up “Barbour and Hood – frequent political enemies – raised millions ...” What possible bearing does the political relationship between the two have, unless it is to bolster the story’s notion to protect Hood by tainting Governor Barbour with the same brush.
- Not until the 18th paragraph do we learn “...agency leaders said the governor’s office was not involved in the selection process” for the contracts reported in the story.
- On the other hand, the story never says Jim Hood gave Joey Langston a “no bid” contract that resulted in \$14 million in fees from the MCI case. The story says Langston got a “negotiated” fee.
- The story doesn’t include Langston’s \$100,000 contribution to Hood’s campaign in the calculation of Hood also receiving \$75,000 from Texas lawyer F. Kenneth Bailey, who was hired in another “no bid” contract to sue drugs companies in Mississippi.
- Just from reading the story itself you find Hood got at least \$175,000 from two identified sources. The Barbour campaigns got \$52,000 from a variety of sources

if you add up the amounts in the story – not the \$73,000 the story cites. The story never accounts for the \$21,000 difference.

- The story mentions “Barbour received multiple \$1,000 contributions from about two dozen employees of the Horne accounting firm in 2006 and 2007,” but never identifies them.
- So, for their own tainted purposes, the Clarion-Ledger only reported the lowest total for Hood, yet the highest for Haley Barbour, apparently trying to put them on some kind of “parity.”
- Plus, the story doesn’t even attempt to put any of these contributions in perspective in terms of total money raised over two statewide election cycles.
- Quotes unnamed “ethics watchdogs” – was Jim Hood’s brother, Tom, interviewed? If so, he must not have had anything quotable to say. Story glaringly omits any mention of Mississippi Ethics Commission.
- Incredibly, the story just brushes over one of the worst political scandals of the past decade – the beef plant fiasco – as being “scrutinized by federal investigators.” Say what? At least three company principals in that misadventure are in federal prison for making illegal campaign contributions to former Governor Musgrove, no thanks to the Mississippi Attorney General’s office. The beef plant cost Mississippi taxpayers \$54 million, and this story gives it a “scrutinized by federal investigators” pass.
- None of the Haley Barbour contributors listed in the story have been tainted by any complaints of criminal wrong-doing.
- In the case of Horne CPA, the story could easily have mentioned Mississippi won federal praise for its diligence in monitoring Katrina contracts, in large part due to Horne’s work.
- To support the reality that all of these contracts were competitively bid, MDA provided the reporter with a detailed list of requirements for the RFP process, which these companies met. She chose not to include any of it in the story.
- The reporter mentions TL Wallace Construction won “lucrative contracts to rebuild bridges destroyed in the Aug. 29, 2005, storm,” but fails to mention those contracts went through MDOT, which does not report to the Governor.
- At a ceremony last week commemorating the 1979 Easter Flood, the reporter peppered MEMA Director Womack with questions over whether the Governor’s office somehow directed these competitively-bid contracts. She finally gets around to quoting his answer – no – in the 23rd paragraph of a 29 paragraph story.

- This story was originally assigned to reporter Jerry Mitchell, but for some reason was turned over to Natalie Chandler. In the Clarion-Ledger's perverted thinking – and editors share a lot of the blame – Jerry won't write anything "bad" about Jim Hood, and Natalie Chandler won't write anything "good" about Haley Barbour.